

SENSE OF THE HOUSE DEPLORING  
TRAGIC AND SENSELESS MUR-  
DER OF BISHOP JUAN JOSE  
GERARDI

SPEECH OF

**HON. NANCY PELOSI**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Wednesday, September 9, 1998*

Ms. PELOSI. Mr. Speaker, I rise in support of House Resolution 421, a resolution deploring the murder of Guatemala Bishop Juan Jose Gerardi.

In late July of this year, I joined my colleagues Representatives GEORGE MILLER and CIRO RODRIGUEZ on a three-day visit to Guatemala. The visit was organized by the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Center for Human Rights. Our goals were to encourage the Guatemalan government to carry out a thorough investigation of the April 26, 1998 murder of Bishop Juan Jose Gerardi; to provide visible support to the Archbishop's Human Rights Office and other human rights organizations in Guatemala; to encourage the United States government to play a more active role in supporting efforts to improve respect for human rights in Guatemala; and to demonstrate full support for the implementation of the peace accords which have brought an end to 36 years of civil war.

Our delegation met with government officials, including Guatemala President Arzu, church leaders, and representatives of numerous community organizations. We paid special attention to the investigation of the tragic murder of Bishop Juan Jose Gerardi. Because of Bishop Gerardi's invaluable work in defense of human rights and the fact that he was killed only days after the release of the report, "Guatemala: Never Again," this crime necessarily has political connotations. If it is not resolved, it would be a devastating blow to the peace process and to domestic and international confidence in the implementation of these goals.

We were encouraged to hear of the government's commitment to aggressively pursue all leads, motives and evidence related to the tragic murder of Bishop Gerardi. Since late July, we have learned that the prosecution has made an initial request for information about the military officers whose names were originally provided by the Archbishop's Human Rights Office. It is vitally important that the prosecution go forward with an exhaustive investigation of the leads suggesting military involvement, just as it has been fully exploring other possible leads. The expeditious and judicious resolution of the investigation into Bishop Gerardi's murder is critical for the continuation of support for the peace accords.

Therefore, I rise in support of House Resolution 421, which calls for the Government of Guatemala to take all steps necessary to resolve the heinous murder of Bishop Gerardi; to continue its efforts to establish effective civilian law enforcement and judicial institutions; to make a renewed commitment to successfully implement the peace accords, especially those accords concerning human rights; and that the United States government provide all necessary support to the investigation of Bishop Gerardi's murder and to continue to support the full implementation of the peace accords.

EXECUTION OF BAHAI BELIEVER  
VIOLATES RECOGNIZED HUMAN  
RIGHTS

**HON. TOM LANTOS**

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, September 10, 1998*

Mr. LANTOS. Mr. Speaker, human rights are universal by definition. Simply by being a member of the human race, every person has certain inviolable rights—those outlined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was created by the members of the United Nations fifty years ago.

Unfortunately, however, not every government in the world recognizes these rights. The Government of Iran recently gave the world a glaring example of the type of officially sanctioned depravity that can occur when rights of the individual are not protected—and in fact are actively violated by his or her own government.

On July 21st the Iranian government executed Ruhollah Rowhani in the town of Mashad. Mr. Rowhani, a married father of four, was not a criminal. He was a member of the Baha'i faith, and there is very credible reasons to believe that his death is a direct result of his faith. He was not accused of any crime that would be recognizable to us here in the United States or in most other places of the world. He was held incommunicado for nearly a year prior to his execution. He was not given access to lawyers. He was simply abducted by the government, held, subjected to a sham trial, judgment was passed, and then he was murdered.

The approximately 300,000 Baha'is who live in Iran are in an extremely precarious position that is highlighted by this extreme treatment of Mr. Rowhani. Although Baha'is are the largest religious minority in Iran, their faith is not recognized as a legitimate religion by the government. In fact, the theocracy in Teheran consider the Baha'i faith to be heresy and an anti-Muslim conspiracy.

Baha'is in Iran are labeled "unprotected infidels" and have no legal rights. Baha'is are prohibited from electing leaders, organizing schools or conducting other religious activities. All cemeteries, holy sites and Baha'i community property were seized after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. Baha'is are denied government jobs and pensions, and more than 10,000 have been dismissed from government and university posts since 1979. Baha'is of school age are also barred from both 4 year high schools and universities, severely limiting economic opportunities. Baha'i marriages are not recognized and the right of inheritance is not recognized for Baha'is. In short, the Baha'i community in Iran is slowly being strangled through a regime of official persecution.

It is important to note also, that the Baha'is in Iran have never engaged in any illegal or anti-government activity that would in any way justify this type of treatment. In fact, it is my understanding that obedience to the civil law of the land in which they live is a principal tenet of Baha'i teachings. The repression of the Baha'is in Iran is purely based on religion and intolerance.

The overall situation facing Baha'is in Iran and the recent execution of Mr. Rowhani raise grave concerns for the fifteen other Baha'is being held by Iranian authorities on religious

charges. In particular, seven men have been sentenced to death and may be facing imminent execution.

I urge the Government of Iran to ensure the immediate safety of three Baha'is most imminently in danger of execution—Ata'ullah Hamid Nasirizdih, Sirus Dhabih-Musqaddam, and Hidayat-Kashifi—and to ensure that these men are afforded fair and public trials prior to any action being taken against them.

I also urge on the White House and State Department Administration to work through appropriate channels, including the United Nations, and to work with our allies and friends to make clear to the Government of Iran that the lives of all Baha'i prisoners must be protected and that this behavior is unacceptable and must stop. The rights of the Baha'is of Iran, and of all humans, are unambiguous. It is the responsibility of the Government of Iran to ensure these rights for all their citizens.

**BROTHER'S BROTHER  
FOUNDATION**

**HON. WILLIAM J. COYNE**

OF PENNSYLVANIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

*Thursday, September 10, 1998*

Mr. COYNE. Mr. Speaker, as Congress moves forward with consideration of the 1999 Foreign Operations bill, I'd like to call my colleagues' attention to the successful programs of the Brother's Brother Foundation (BBF), based in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Using both federal and private funds, the BBF promotes international health and education through the efficient and effective distribution and provision of donated medical, educational, and agricultural resources.

An example of the international aid provided by the Brother's Brother Foundation is its public-private partnership to provide much-needed books to developing countries. BBF used U.S. government funding to ship half of the 40,000,000 privately donated books it received to 50 countries. The requested books are valued at \$340 million, and range from children's picture books to medical school texts. In the Philippines, for example, the program has been in operation for ten years, providing more than 8 million books for use by 15 million students in 38,000 schools and libraries. BBF works with U.S. Philippine Rotary Clubs to coordinate the collection and distribution of the books.

Another example of the important work that the Brother's Brother Foundation does is provide agricultural assistance to developing countries. BBF shipped 7,000 tons of donated corn and vegetable seed to 20 needy countries, including many new states like Armenia. This seed planted 22,000 square miles of farm land. The seed and the volunteer farming technical assistance that was provided with it helped to improve agriculture efficiency and increase rural family incomes. In the Republic of Georgia, for example, U.S. Agency for International Development representatives reported that "Production yields expanded 2 to 3 times." U.S. government funding provided 75 percent of the cost of shipping this seed overseas.

The value of non-profit organizations like the Brother's Brother Foundation are immeasurable. Their efforts are essential for the success of public-private partnerships. I ask my